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No. 325

THE CHILD IN THE HOUSE

A Play in One Act

BY
HOMER HILDRETH HOWARD

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THE CHILD IN THE HOUSE.

CHARACTERS.

(In order of appearance.)

MRS. BARNES *An ordinary woman of the working class, but one who has taken advantage of every means in her power to improve herself. She has developed ideas rather in advance of the other women of her class. She is extremely neat, as is her house, even if it is very poor. She is very intense, sad and subdued, although she is capable of blazing out determinedly at moments*

JACK.....*A messenger boy*

MRS. KEEGAN....*An Irishwoman. A neighbor of*
MRS. BARNES

JIM BARNES.....*A good enough fellow, but weak*

THE BABY

PLACE:—*A City.*

TIME:—*The present.*

\$0.25

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THE CHILD IN THE HOUSE.

SCENE:—*A basement room in a tenement house.* It contains only the barest necessities. There is a stove down L. and a large wooden rocker near it. Up L. is a small stand with a bucket, dipper and basin. Down R. a cupboard with china and near it a table with two chairs. A door up R. leads into a bedroom. Against the wall are piled boxes of artificial flowers. The room is poor, but extremely neat. At rise, a woman in blue and white calico is seated at the table making flowers. She stops, takes out a cabinet-sized photograph from her pocket and looks at it, is about to kiss it, puts it down with a sigh and begins work again. A messenger boy is seen through the door. A knock.*

THE WOMAN. Come in.

(The boy comes in.)

THE BOY. Hullo, Mrs. Barnes. Any flowers ready for me to-day?

* When the play was produced at the Toy Theatre, Boston, the room was lighted by two half-windows, one on either side of the door in the middle of the rear wall, and by a window which filled the upper half of the door. This door was at the bottom of a flight of stairs leading down from the side-walk. Through the glass in the door and through the half-windows one could see a gray stone wall surmounted by an iron railing.

(MRS. BARNES *wearily points to three large boxes.*)

MRS. BARNES. Them's ready. Ain't there no message nor orders from the firm?

JACK. Sure. There's always orders for you. (*He gives her an envelope and gets down the boxes while she reads the note. In doing so he brushes the photograph onto the floor, picks it up and looks at it*)

MRS. BARNES. They want carnations. They've forgot I don't like to make 'em.

JACK. (*Reading from the photograph*) "George Barnes. William Barnes." Was them yours, Mrs. Barnes?

(MRS. BARNES *looks at him and comes over to him.*)

MRS. BARNES. Yes, Jack. William—he'd a been your size by now if he'd a lived; George, he was younger.—I've often looked at you when you come for the flowers—and thought o' my William. I couldn't keep from thinkin' a lot about 'em to-day, and I had that out lookin' at it. Don't do no good—just makes me sad like. (*She reaches for the photograph and takes the boy's hand in hers. He is shy at first. She draws him towards her*) Jack—Jack—How red and cold your hands is! Ain't you no mittens?

JACK. I don't mind.

MRS. BARNES. Well, you come right over here to the stove and get 'em warm. (*She leads him to the big chair by the stove and has him spread out his hands to the heat. She stands looking at him*) Just wait till I see. (*She goes to the cupboard and takes a pair of mittens from one of the drawers. She comes back to him and looks down at him for a moment*) Jack—I couldn't never give these away. They was for William—but you—may as well have 'em.

JACK. (*Standing up and taking them*) Gee! Thank you, Mrs. Barnes!

(*She is fond of him and puts an arm around his neck.*)

MRS. BARNES. Is your mother good to you?

JACK. Y-es. (*Quickly*) You know there's others at home besides me.

(*MRS. BARNES gathers him into her arms, stroking his hair, and says to herself:*)

MRS. BARNES. Oh, Jack!—Why is it that them as has 'em can't be good to 'em and them as would be good to 'em can't have 'em? (*Rousing herself*) Well, well—I must go back to my flowers! (*She goes reluctantly to the table and he watches her a moment*)

JACK. My mother takes in washing.

MRS. BARNES. She does?

JACK. I suspect she don't make as much money as you do makin' flowers. (*He is putting on his mittens and gathering up the boxes*)

MRS. BARNES. I do earn a tidy bit. If our boys had lived! My man's been steady now a good little while. (*She sighs*) That's how it goes.—Jack, won't you kiss me? (*He hangs back for a moment and then comes to her and kisses her. She holds him in her arms for a moment. Then he gathers up his boxes and goes. She goes to the door with him*) They're bulky like, but not heavy.—Good-bye, Jack!

JACK. (*Outside*) 'Bye, Mrs. Barnes.

(*MRS. BARNES watches him a moment, then comes back to the table humming happily and begins work. Her fingers move more and more slowly and the humming grows more and more halting. She stops to look at the picture and puts it down*)

resolutely and goes to work. A woman is seen through the door. She comes in. She is dressed in black and carries a bunch of half withered pink carnations. She sits in the large rocking-chair.)

THE WOMAN. Good-afternoon to ye.

MRS. BARNES. How do you do, Mrs. Keegan.

MRS. KEEGAN. It's that boy from the factory I just passed and him with three big boxes. It's not another married woman in the neighborhood that works as hard as you do yourself.

MRS. BARNES. My husband's as good as any woman's in the whole section, Mrs. Keegan; if it wasn't for the drink.

MRS. KEEGAN. It's beasts they are, all of 'em. But it's not without 'em we could be doin' at all, at all.

MRS. BARNES. We ought not to be always dependin' on 'em.

MRS. KEEGAN. Ah, that's some of the advancin' ideas you're after gettin' at the settlement house.

MRS. BARNES. Well, don't I, myself, earn as much as Jim?

MRS. KEEGAN. But if all the women was to take to earnin' their own themselves, where at all, at all, would the next generation be?

MRS. BARNES. There's too many boys now, who'll only grow up to be like their fathers. Oh, I s'pose I ought to be almost glad my two boys died!

MRS. KEEGAN. Oh, my, Mrs. Barnes!—Well, and here am I, almost forgettin' about the lovely funeral, and you not bein' able to be in it at all, at all! Just see the beautiful flowers, and Mary give them to me; they're right off her mother's coffin!

MRS. BARNES. Gi' me one. I've got to make some carnations and I've forgot how. (MRS. KEEGAN hands over one of the flowers which MRS. BARNES takes and looks at intently and caresses)

What's goin' to become of that woman's two, poor, orphan children?

MRS. KEEGAN. For Mary, it's arranged that a rich lady will take her into her house.

MRS. BARNES. She's hardly twelve, yet! She'll be worked half to death!

MRS. KEEGAN. Work! It's no work she'll be doin'! It's adopted she is!

MRS. BARNES. Adopted!! (MRS. BARNES *stops working for a moment and then begins again rapidly. She stops again and then forces herself to work. Her next speeches show intensity mixed with excitement and indecision. MRS. KEEGAN goes on without paying any attention to her*)

MRS. KEEGAN. And sure, the lady has a house as big as the whole of Muggin's Department Store itself, if what they tell me is truth!

MRS. BARNES. Anybody goin' to take the baby, George?

MRS. KEEGAN. Nobody, that I know of.

MRS. BARNES. (*Much excited*) He'll have to go to the Orphan's Home?

MRS. KEEGAN. It's likely.—You should a seen the dress the lady wore and she comin' to the buryin'!

MRS. BARNES. (*Thoughtfully, sighing*) The woman who's goin' to take Mary's rich, I s'pose?

MRS. KEEGAN. She is that indeed! And she with six hired girls in her house!

MRS. BARNES. Poor baby. (*Gets up, walks about nervously a little and then sits down again*)

MRS. KEEGAN. He is so! And I didn't have five o' my own I'd take him myself. It's a fine baby it is!

MRS. BARNES. (*Half to herself*) People who haven't the money to raise 'em ought not to have children.

MRS. KEEGAN. Sure, and mine will be as well raised as yours, and they still living at all! I'll be goin' now and leavin' ye to say your mean things to yourself! (*She moves towards the door*)

MRS. BARNES. I was thinkin' of us, Jim and me, not of you, Mrs. Keegan.

MRS. KEEGAN. Maybe you was. I'll be goin' anyhow.

MRS. BARNES. Don't, I want to talk to you!

(MRS. KEEGAN *comes back and sits down.*)

MRS. KEEGAN. If it's decent talk I'll be after hearin' it.

(MRS. BARNES *is nervous and hesitates. She comes to stand beside MRS. KEEGAN.*)

MRS. BARNES. I—if—I—I'm goin' to take that baby!

MRS. KEEGAN. You're not surely, Mrs. Barnes!

MRS. BARNES. Ah, you who have your house full of the voices of children and their little arms around your neck, crying sometimes and sometimes laughing, you don't know how I long—it's thirteen years since mine went——!

MRS. KEEGAN. Do you know how to raise a boy, at all, at all? Your own died, didn't they?

MRS. BARNES. Look here, Mrs. Keegan—I've never told this to nobody. But 'twas no fault o' mine they died!

MRS. KEEGAN. I didn't mean that, I just——

MRS. BARNES. (*Not heeding her*) It's hard to be married to a drunkard and not have children!

MRS. KEEGAN. What's that you're sayin'?

MRS. BARNES. (*Half turning away*) It's true!—I'm a healthy woman—both my boys was weaklings—they got tuberculosis and they—died—both! They was bright and they had good brains! I might never a knowed how it was only I heard the doctor talkin' to my Jim. He told him that our boys died because their father was a drunkard!

MRS. KEEGAN. Why, Mrs. Barnes. I never heard the likes o' that!

MRS. BARNES. He told him again and again that the fault was his and his alone. I can hear him a sayin' yet, "Jim Barnes, you're a drunkard—you're not fit to be the father of boys and girls." Jim never found out that I know, but that's the reason we've never had no more children! It wouldn't be right for me to let children come into the world with no fair chance to live. (*She goes back to the flowers*)

MRS. KEEGAN. But my man drinks—is there a man at all that don't?

MRS. BARNES. It's different! Jim has it in his system all the time fairly. "Alcoholism," the doctor calls it, for I talked to him about it after I heard what he told Jim, and he says that a man that has used it for a long time, and has it in him that much, will be all run down so that if he has children they are apt to be took easy by disease. There's no doubt about it. Do you suppose I'd a been all these years without children unless there was a good reason fur it?

MRS. KEEGAN. You're a brave woman, Mrs. Barnes! Myself I'd not had the courage to do it!

MRS. BARNES. It's not easy.

MRS. KEEGAN. And will himself never stop drinking?

MRS. BARNES. I don't know! He's had a right long steady spell now. He promised the doctor—and he's promised me. But don't you understand, Mrs. Keegan, that with a man as old him the curse is likely to still be on the children! There's no use!

MRS. KEEGAN. But you're think o' takin' this un!

MRS. BARNES. But, Mrs. Keegan, I just got through tellin' you that would be different! Any child o' our own might be took so but one that's adopted wouldn't have the curse. Jim's been steady I told you, and we've got a bit laid by in the bank.

I'm hesitatin' cause I don't rightly know if we've got enough to raise him proper.

MRS. KEEGAN. And how much might that take?

MRS. BARNES. I don't rightly know—but together I think we might just about manage. Maybe it would help to keep Jim sober—(*She clenches her hands appealingly*)

MRS. KEEGAN. And if I wanted a baby like ye do, I'd have it; that I would—(*Gets up*)

MRS. BARNES. Oh, I'll work with every bit of all the strength God gives me for the joy of a child in my house!

(*A pause, MRS. KEEGAN is uncertain what to do and stands about helplessly.*)

MRS. KEEGAN. (*Brightening*) I'll run now and bring the baby itself fur ye to see.

MRS. BARNES. No! No!—Yes, do! Mrs. Keegan, do! do!

(*MRS. KEEGAN goes out looking back joyously and encouragingly at MRS. BARNES who continues to walk about nervously and excitedly. She looks very happy.*)

MRS. KEEGAN. (*Calling from outside*) I'll be right back; it's just around the corner.

(*MRS. BARNES goes to the door and looks after MRS. KEEGAN. Then she comes to the table, takes up the photograph and looks at it, pressing it to her breast. She sits down at the table preparatory to setting to work on the flowers again. A moment later a man's form is seen through the door rear. He stumbles against the masonry, and turns to fumble at the door.*)

MRS. BARNES. Mrs. Keegan—(*Turning quickly*)

—Jim—(*She takes him by the arm and puts him into the big chair. He is not drunk, but he has been drinking and his mind is not absolutely clear. Sighing*) Sit here. (*She stands looking down at him. He looks up at her*) Jim! Jim! What's the matter? (*She makes a despairing gesture and turns away to hide her disappointment. JIM twists about and grumbles inarticulately*)

JIM. Wasn't that—Mrs.—Keegan I saw comin' out o' here?

MRS. BARNES. Yes, Jim.

JIM. What's she after?

MRS. BARNES. She was comin' from Sarah Donnell's buryin' and just stopped in to tell me about it.

JIM. Two months since her man died. She left some kids, didn't she?

MRS. BARNES. Yes. —Ain't you home early, Jim?

JIM. Not goin' back to work to the shop.

MRS. BARNES. Jim!

JIM. Laid off—dull season—what the hell's the use——!

MRS. BARNES. I believe you've been drinkin'. Don't go gettin' discouraged; we've got a bit laid up for the rainy day. It's queer how things never keep on goin' good, but we'll have to be glad we're ready for bad times. (*Looks about to see if MRS. KEEGAN is coming and then she takes JIM by the arm*) Come into the bed-room and rest a little—you're tired. You'll feel different after you're rested. (*She gets him into the bed-room up R; the stage is bare for a moment. Then MRS. KEEGAN, red and out of breath hurries in with the baby. A moment later MRS. BARNES returns from the bed-room. She closes the door carefully after her*) Oh, Mrs. Keegan—! (*She buries her face against the baby for a moment*)

MRS. KEEGAN. I'm all out of breath, I hurried that much. Isn't he just the cute one?

(MRS. BARNES *takes the baby and fondles it.*)

MRS. BARNES. You're mine!—mine!—mine!—
(*She holds the baby in one arm and stretches the other out to MRS. KEEGAN who takes her outstretched hand and holds it a while*)

MRS. KEEGAN. To think that you're goin' to keep him——

(MRS. BARNES *gives the baby to MRS. KEEGAN and stands looking down at him.*)

MRS. BARNES. Mrs. Keegan, Jim's home—out of work—just fate I guess—been drinkin' too; I don't know, I don't know——

MRS. KEEGAN. That don't make no difference at all, at all.

MRS. BARNES. You see I can't do it all alone—
together we might just about manage.

MRS. KEEGAN. You earn enough yourself to support the child.

MRS. BARNES. That's not enough! He must be well brought up—I can't let him risk havin' a life without nothin' in it.

MRS. KEEGAN. It's a foolish woman you are——

MRS. BARNES. It looked easy before—but now—with Jim drinkin'—I don't know! (*Pause*) He loved our boys. —But if he can't resist, there'll be no child in the house! (*She stoops and takes the child again and speaks to it softly*) 'Mine!—mine!—mine!—mine!—mine!—mine!—mine!—mine!

MRS. KEEGAN. Do ye mean surely that ye will not take the child unless himself is to——?

MRS. BARNES. That I do! I'll have no child with a drunken man around! What way would that be to raise a boy?

MRS. KEEGAN. But others does it.

MRS. BARNES. They're wrong! I can't—I won't! It is a duty I owe the child.

MRS. KEEGAN. And will he have to go maybe to the Orphan's Home?

(MRS. BARNES bows her head over the child.)

MRS. BARNES. It'll be better so.

(Silence. MRS. KEEGAN watches MRS. BARNES and wipes a tear away before she speaks.)

MRS. KEEGAN. And you so lonely——!

MRS. BARNES. Don't—don't—can't you see—how much I want——! (Noise of something dropping on the floor in the adjoining room is heard. MRS. BARNES holds the child for a moment, then gives it to MRS. KEEGAN and motions her to the door, looking meanwhile toward the bed-room door) Go now! I must talk to Jim—he's comin' out. Go, go! Come back after a little. —— I do hope I can keep the baby—I hope so—I hope so——

(MRS. KEEGAN has gone up towards the door, rear. JIM opens the door and comes in just in time to hear the last few words that MRS. KEEGAN speaks as she is going out the door.)

MRS. KEEGAN. In a little while I'll bring back the baby.

JIM. Baby? (He goes towards the door and looks after her) What's she here fur agin?

(MRS. BARNES is sitting at the table with her head in her hands.)

MRS. BARNES. Oh, Jim, Jim——!

JIM. What baby's she talkin' 'bout? (Silence)

'Was a baby in the street-car I come home on—right side o' me. I talked to her and she—she had a apple and she gi' me it—and I give it back. (MRS. BARNES *sits up and watches him as if she were measuring his strength*) 'T fell on the floor—there was 'nother man—but I—I give it back. I—(He stops and turning to look intently at the woman asks in a strained voice and very soberly) Mary, we ought to have some kids around here?

MRS. KEEGAN. You say that, Jim Barnes!

(JIM turns away meditatively.)

JIM. A baby—its hands was—fat——

MRS. BARNES. Is it me that don't want a child?

JIM. (*To himself*) 'Twas a cute one.

MRS. BARNES. A man that spends his money for drink can't raise a family.

JIM. I work and I git good pay. I ain't touched a drop fur a long time.

MRS. BARNES. But, Jim, you been drinkin' to-day—to-day of all times! If you only knew!

JIM. Well, well, just a drop. I was knocked out bein' laid off. Now 'twas only a drop. If you don't believe it—(JIM gets up and takes a handful of bills and change from his pocket) There's my pay—count and see. (MRS. BARNES takes the money and puts it in a purse in the cupboard. He watches her) That baby in the street-car—and—we—buried ours, Mary.

MRS. BARNES. If our own'd a lived, I wonder if we could a raised 'em right?

JIM. I'd worked harder'n hell! It's kids we need! I'd a kept sober, too——

MRS. BARNES. Are you sure o' it, Jim? are you sure?

JIM. Sure I am! (JIM is uneasy and changes the subject) Ain't there goin' to be no supper?

MRS. BARNES. Yes, Jim—it's early yet—I'll put

on the kettle—there's bread and onions and we'll have a cup o' tea. (*She busies herself with the fire, the kettle and the table during the following*)

JIM. Mary?

MRS. BARNES. Yes?

(*He gets up and staggers towards the stove.*)

JIM. Mary, it's your damned high and mighty goin's on have made trouble fur us.

MRS. BARNES. Oh, no, Jim!

(*He gets too near the stove and in staggering a little he burns his hand. He starts back and cries out plaintively.*)

JIM. I've burned me!

(*MRS. BARNES comes over to him, makes him sit in the big chair and looks at the hand.*)

MRS. BARNES. It's not hurt, Jim.

JIM. I say it's burned!

MRS. BARNES. I'll tie it up. (*She gets old linen from the drazver in the cupboard and binds the hand while he watches her closely, looking at her affectionately all the while*)

JIM. You're a good girl.

MRS. BARNES. Oh, Jim.

JIM. What's the matter—? (*Silence*) Hum! What's eatin' you to-day? You ain't like yourself, Mary.

MRS. BARNES. It's hard, Jim!

JIM. Now, Mary, I ain't touched a drop for ever so long—it's just to-day loosin' my job.

MRS. BARNES. If only I could be sure! With your money in the saloon-keeper's cash-box, what way could we raise a boy?

JIM. You act—a person'd think you was glad—

your fool ideas,—mother's classes—damned settlement house—bein' clean—bah—that's why they died, I guess——

MRS. BARNES. Don't Jim,—I *know* why they died! I don't want ever to have to throw it up to you—but—don't, don't accuse *me* about the boys' death!

JIM. Well, I ain't glad they died. A man wants a kid around sometimes.

(*Silence.*)

MRS. BARNES. Jim, it might all be right yet if you'd stop drinkin'.

JIM. Mary, the stuff won't let me alone.— If they'd a lived maybe I'd a done different.

MRS. BARNES. I wonder. (*She watches him, trying to decide what to do*)

JIM. If we just had one like that was in the street-car, now——

(MRS. BARNES *goes to him, puts her hands on his shoulders and looks him squarely in the eye.*)

MRS. BARNES. Look here, Jim! (*She hesitates*)

JIM. Hum?

MRS. BARNES. I'd like—I'd like to adopt Sarah Donnell's baby——

JIM. (*Pleased*) A baby—us with a baby?

MRS. BARNES. You'd like that?

JIM. Would I? —That's what Mrs. Keegan——

MRS. BARNES. Yes——

JIM. You an' me——

MRS. BARNES. I'd be so happy, Jim!

JIM. A baby——

(MRS. BARNES *grows serious and speaks earnestly, trying to impress him.*)

MRS. BARNES. If you was a steady man I'd do it.

JIM. I'll be steady—I'll hunt a new job yet to-day till I find it. — You'll see, you'll see—Never a drop will I drink except it be a taste of the tea from your pot there on the stove. I'll be a man for that baby and for you, Mary.

MRS. BARNES. Oh, Jim, Jim! If you *will* do it—
(*She smiles and brushes away a tear*)

JIM. I will that! I'll go now—(*He has risen and now he starts towards the door as if he were going out*)

MRS. BARNES. Don't! We'll be havin' our tea and be thinkin' what's best to be done. Oh, Jim, you make me that happy! Soon, now, Mrs. Keegan'll come back with the baby.

JIM. Our baby?

MRS. BARNES. Yes, Jim, yes—our baby! We will keep it, won't we?

JIM. We—we will——

(*There is a moment's silence.*)

MRS. BARNES. Won't we be happy now?

JIM. We will that. I must find work right off.

MRS. BARNES. If only you— It's been a long time now, but to-day makes me wonder about you. You will, won't you—won't you?

(*MRS. BARNES' doubt of him grows. She stands and watches him.*)

MRS. BARNES. It's a undertakin' to raise a boy right, you know.

JIM. You'll be a good mother to 'im.

MRS. BARNES. But it's just as much what sort of a father he has that counts, or maybe more!

JIM. (*Vaguely*) Yes! Yes! Of course; of course!

MRS. BARNES. But don't you see, Jim, that it

wouldn't do ever to let him see you come home like to-day? Besides it will take all the money we both earn—all of it—to bring him up.

JIM. Well I want him, too, just as much as—as you do—o' course I do——

(MRS. BARNES' *doubt grows.*)

MRS. BARNES. Well, let's have our supper. (*She goes to the cupboard while he goes to the basin and washes his hands. MRS. BARNES opens the cupboard and takes out a loaf of bread which JIM, with his back turned, does not see. She starts for the table with the bread, looks at JIM, and, then making a resolve after a moment's hesitation, turns and puts the bread back in the cupboard and gets a pocket-book from which she takes a piece of money*) The first thing in the morning you'll need to look for a job.

JIM. Sure.

MRS. BARNES. Oh, say, I forgot to get any bread. You get a loaf at Peele's, just the other side of Hogan's saloon, you know. Take this. (*She gives him the money*)

JIM. It's a loaf o' bread you need, is it?

MRS. BARNES. Yes, it's bread I'm sending you after. You needn't be but a minute. To the grocery for bread, you know! (*He goes out the door, rear. She follows him and stands by the door to see which way he goes. Then she turns and clasps her hands in silent prayer. She goes to the table and begins work on a bunch of flowers but she is too nervous and excited to keep on with it. She smiles and looks worried in turn. She walks about; now going to the door, now arranging a dish on the table, now looking at the tea, etc. She is standing with her back to the door when MRS. KEEGAN and the baby are seen through the door and, as MRS. BARNES hears the rattling of the door knob, she*

cries out gladly) Jim! (*She turns as MRS. KEEGAN comes in and her tone changes from one of gladness to one of doubt*) Oh, it's you.

MRS. KEEGAN. Yes. I saw that man o' yours goin' out so I thought I'd run in now.

MRS. BARNES. Yes, yes.

MRS. KEEGAN. Are you goin' to have the baby sure? The whole neighborhood is that proud o' you——

MRS. BARNES. He wants him as much as ever I do but the liquor's strong with him yet, I'm afraid.

MRS. KEEGAN. Well, maybe the child is just what he's needin' to keep him sober.

MRS. BARNES. I'll run no such risks! It's up to him to decide. I give him a quarter to go and buy bread. It's a test. If he comes back without the bread you must go away with the baby—mine—mine—dear child—(*She caresses the child; for the moment very happy*)

MRS. KEEGAN. If himself spends the money fur drink you mean you'd not—you mean I've got to take the baby away fur good?

MRS. BARNES. Yes, that's it, that's it——

MRS. KEEGAN. But what will all them neighbors say?

MRS. BARNES. Promise—promise——!

MRS. KEEGAN. W—well—all right—if you say so——

(*Silence. MRS. BARNES walks up and down, pausing to look at the baby. She can hardly keep her hands off it. After a little MRS. KEEGAN can contain herself no longer and she blurts out.*)'

MRS. KEEGAN. D'you think——?

(*MRS. BARNES shakes her head and puts out her*

hand with a movement that commands silence. A nervous, tense pause.)

MRS. BARNES. I wish Jim would come! (MRS. BARNES *walks nervously again. Finally she stops and kneels in front of the child, facing the rear. She caresses the baby, saying soft endearments to it all the while*) Mine, mine!—mine!—dear, dear!—mine! (JIM *has appeared at the door, rear. He holds a small whiskey bottle in one hand. MRS. BARNES looks up and sees him*) Jim!

(MRS. KEEGAN *gets up and steps to one side, looking toward the rear. MRS. BARNES bows her head upon the chair beside which she had been kneeling. JIM has staggered into the room.*)

MRS. KEEGAN. Poor dear, a shame it is——

(JIM *comes forward and MRS. BARNES rises.*)

JIM. That's you—o-old M-Mrs. Keegan——

(MRS. BARNES *leads him to a chair, and turns towards MRS. KEEGAN as she speaks.*)

MRS. BARNES. You see—it's impossible—now—(JIM *tries to put the bottle to his lips to drink from it but MRS. BARNES takes it from him after a little struggle and drops it onto the table. JIM laughs in a maudlin fashion*) Jim! why did you—why!—why did you do it—!

JIM. Y-you gi'me the—m-money——

MRS. KEEGAN. It's ashamed o' yourself you aught to be, Jim Barnes.

(*She has come a step towards him while she speaks. He looks at her and tries to get up from his chair.*)

JIM. Put down our—n-new baby—I—say—you put it—d-down——

MRS. KEEGAN. (*To MRS. BARNES*) You're goin' to keep it Mrs.——?

(*JIM has struggled to his feet.*)

JIM. Keep it?—o' course—. You just mind y-your own business——

MRS. BARNES. No, Jim, we do *not* keep it——

(*JIM turns towards her and takes a step or two unsteadily.*)

JIM. We do—I say we do! We—we—d-do—keep it——

MRS. KEEGAN. (*To MRS. BARNES*) Why don't you——?

MRS. BARNES. (*Wearily*) There'll never be a child in this house! (*She motions MRS. KEEGAN to go, but she does not understand and comes nearer*) Go! Go!

(*MRS. KEEGAN starts for the door. JIM tries to follow.*)

JIM. No you d-don't there!

(*MRS. BARNES gets between them and tries to push him away from MRS. KEEGAN whom he has almost overtaken.*)

MRS. BARNES. Jim! Jim!

(*He seizes MARY'S arm and wrenches it. He grumbles in an ugly manner and they struggle for a moment before she is able to get free. He has hurt her arm. MRS. KEEGAN has been standing about not knowing what to do.*)

MRS. KEEGAN. Oh! Oh, deary me! Oh! Oh!
Oh——!

(MRS. BARNES *succeeds in pushing JIM back into the chair where he sits stupidly overcome by the exertion. MRS. KEEGAN has gone up by the door where MRS. BARNES follows her. She kisses the baby. She has almost lost control of herself.*)

MRS. BARNES. (*Softly*) I did so want you.

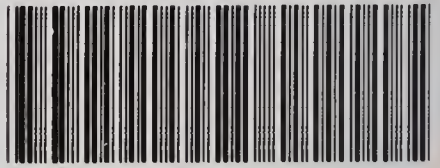
(MRS. KEEGAN *goes out slowly, shaking her head. JIM struggles up again when he sees MRS. KEEGAN going with the baby. MRS. BARNES is standing by the table and JIM sinks back into the chair again.*)

MRS. BARNES. You've made your choice, Jim. (*She lifts the bottle from the table and stands looking at it. Almost bitterly*) It's took this one from me as it took my others, too!

(MRS. BARNES *lets the bottle fall onto the table, sinks into a chair and buries her face in her hands as the curtain falls slowly.*)

CURTAIN.

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